

Raised Bill No. 1051, An Act Strengthening Connecticut's Elections

Testimony by Bristol Registrars of Voters Sharon Krawiecki and Kevin McCauley

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairman Jutila and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you concerning Raised Bill No. 1051, An Act Strengthening Connecticut's Elections.

The Registrars of Voters Office in Bristol is represented by an experienced and a newly elected registrar. My perspective as a newly elected registrar is fresh and my most evident observation is that Connecticut's registrars are professionals. I was elected this past November and quickly realized how serious we take our roles as elections administrators. I personally don't know the individuals involved with the improper handling of elections these past few years, but I'm sure we can all agree that we can count on one hand the isolated number of registrars' offices amongst our 169 municipalities that were involved. There are those offices where teamwork is challenged, yet elections are still accomplished without incident. The existing system works, but I recognize there are areas that need improvement.

In the short time since becoming a Registrar, I have learned that the day to day tasks of keeping current and running elections requires two sets of eyes and teamwork. Attention to detail is paramount and cannot be accomplished with a one-registrar model. Also, a two-party system allows for checks and balances in the office and aids in providing unbiased support of our electors.

My colleague and I would like to highlight the real issues that we feel need to be addressed by the legislature. This is a major piece of legislation, but is not the panacea to solve the issues.

This legislation was brought forth in response to the major failure of the three Hartford registrars and their three deputies to do their job properly and according to existing law. Their failure is due in part to the "personalities" in that office, but also to their lack of training.

This bill calls for the appointment of one registrar by the political legislative body of each municipality. It further calls for the appointed or elected municipal clerk to appoint a deputy registrar, but it does not take the "personality" out of the equation. Instead, it inserts "politics" into the process and it has the potential to re-create the Hartford crisis in all 169 towns across the state.

In addition, no statutory authority is in place to recall or discipline registrars. The Secretary of the State currently has no weapons to penalize registrars who have not had training and who do not comply with state statutes. A mechanism needs to be established to address those who fail to comply and allows for statutory disciplinary action, which could include recall.

- Training and Certification

Education and certification is essential to registrars. An additional statutory change should require annual training and certification. This will allow experienced and new registrars to stay current with election laws and best practices.

Members of this committee, in your professional careers, continuing education is as necessary as it is with ours.

This is why ROVAC vigorously supports the re-establishment of a mandated certification program. In cooperation with the Secretary of State, ROVAC has re-initiated the registrars' certification program. This should be formalized within the year.

- Technology

More advanced elections technology is available and used in other states and we support the Secretary of the State as she seeks to qualify vendors and electronic equipment to be incorporated into the available tools registrars use on Election Day. Electronic poll books check voters in with less waiting time and have the capability for real-time access of data. They will also allow for labeling absentee voters prior to and throughout Election Day. This will all significantly aid in end of night reporting.

- Mandates and Municipal Budgets

Please remember that the bill as drafted is a new state mandate. The fiscal note attached to this bill needs to say it will force every city and town's budget to absorb large expenditures of money to implement the changes. Regardless of how well-intentioned this bill proposal is, it remains a gigantic unfunded mandate.

This major piece of legislation is being presented in a very expeditious time frame. To ensure transparency, my colleague and I suggest that a task force be formed to study the merits of all testimony submitted here today. It should consist of, as an example, representatives from the Secretary of State's office, registrars association (ROVAC), town clerks association, local, state and federal office holders. They should be allowed the time needed for due diligence in order to do the job right. This task force can then report back to this Committee with its findings and recommendations.

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